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AUTHOR Burns-McCoy, Nancie
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ABSTRACT

Does a specific strand of feminist theory within composition theory--expressionist feminist--have the potential to bring about institutional or societal change? A useful way to start an investigation is to consider a few problematic presuppositions of expressionist discourse. First, literature in this field rarely employs the term "empowerment" but it does invoke the term's goals: "to give authority, to enable, to license." The agent, the owner and distributor of this power, is the teacher, an ironic supposition because it perpetuates the power structures of the traditional teacher-student relationship and subverts the notion of student-centered learning. Second, the primary emphasis of some expressionist approaches is to help students find their buried voices, but how do the practitioners of this approach construe student voices or the lack of them? Does silence always mean powerlessness? Third, expressionist practitioners strive for dialogue involving authentic, self-expressive voices, but in doing so they ignore the dangers and constraints of academic dialogue. A review of early, recent and current approaches to expressionist teaching literature arrives at an alternative to dialogue, that is, poststructuralist discourse, the attempt to make room for all students to tell their stories. The goal of such interaction becomes not debate but rather as full a glimpse of the topic as those present are equipped to offer through "situated knowledges." (Contains 20 references.) (TB)

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Expressionist Feminist Pedagogy and the Politics of Form

Nancie Burns-McCoy

University of Idaho

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Expressionist Feminist Pedagogy and the Politics of Form

> The feminist teacher can be a potent agent of change who, through combinations of course content and process, has the power to replace self-hatred with self-love, incapacity with capacity, unfreedom with freedom, blindness with knowledge. (M. Culley, 1985)

The sweeping assumptions made ten years ago about the potential of feminist theories and practices make us blush today. We are now cautious to suggest that feminist approaches have the liberatory scope we desire, mainly because change comes painfully slow, and the sweeping claims made ten or twenty years ago have yet to materialize. We still teach in institutions driven by patriarchal traditions (Gore 61). However, in a narrower context, at a classroom level, feminist theories and practices have brought about change, change in the way business is carried out, in the way writing is taught and knowledge perceived. The rub comes between what's considered acceptable within the smaller context of our classrooms and the larger societal contexts that make up our institutions. This article explores this rub as it considers whether or not a specific strand of feminist theory within composition theory--which I label expressionist feminist--has the potential to bring about institutional/societal change or whether it remains simply an ideal that decontexualizes the classroom from greater institutional contexts and hence fails to function as an agent of real change.

Some Elements of Expressionist Feminist Pedagogy

Certain elements that distinguish feminist expressionist pedagogy from other branches of feminist approaches include (a) leading students toward their own voices through practices that develop self awareness, which leads to (b) a student's ability to express that voice and awareness in the public domain. Offering an example of this element, Pamela Annas announces:

> I have structured into the course writing exercises and class discussions that attempt to connect students with the complexity of who they are, that make writing a less mysterious and more familiar enterprise, and that move them from silence to words and from private to public writing. (Annas 5)

Similarly, Elizabeth Flynn suggests:

> But we must also encourage [women] to become self-consciously aware of what their experience in the world has

> been and how this experience is related to the politics of gender. Then we must encourage our women students to write from the power of that experience. (434)

Accordingly, a student's ability to express self-awareness allows her to assume a position within a democratic environment in which all (particularly the marginalized, in this instance women) might have their say.

Reoccurring themes throughout this body of literature include the educative concept of empowerment, student voice, alternative writing forms, and the importance of classroom dialogue. These indeed are the very concepts that guide my own practice. Hence my interest in this body of literature stems from my own growing concern that to employ these practices might in the long run divert my attention from any real change at an institutional/societal level and instead merely accommodate women to inequitable institutional norms that remain unchallenged. My goal here is not to discredit these approaches to teaching writing but rather to ponder their dangers, to explore their normalizing tendencies, how they might serve as instruments of domination despite the intentions of their creators (Sawicki quoted in Gore 54). My question becomes: Have the claims, goals, and approaches of feminist expressionist pedagogies been proven in some way to do other than prepare students to proceed with business as usual? Patti Lather insists that an effective feminism is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society (258). Does a feminist advocacy that helps women find their own voices and acknowledge their politically oppressed positions truly empower them to shape and reshape their worlds? Or does this approach in composition theory work simply to maintain the status quo?

Theoretical Frame

The themes and goals of feminist expressionist concerns often surface in feminist critiques of critical pedagogy, critiques that scrutinize whether or not change through practice actually takes place or is possible at an institutional or societal level. Therefore I bring critical pedagogy discourses to bear upon feminist expressionist discourses within composition theory to scrutinize the latter discourses' effects on conventions that serve to marginalize certain thinkers and writers. For clarity's sake, I offer a working definition of critical pedagogy presented by Elizabeth Ellsworth in "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy": ". . . critical pedagogy support[s] classroom analysis and rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality, and silencing of marginalized

voices, and authoritarian social structures" (92). Feminist critiques contemplate the means critical pedagogy employs to bring about this eradication of inequity:

> To the extent that our efforts to put discourses of critical pedagogy into practice led us to reproduce relations of domination in our classroom, these discourses were working through us in repressive ways, and had themselves become vehicles of repression. (92)

In the spirit of the above critique, I consider how feminist expressionist approaches to composition theory construe such concepts and practices as empowerment, student voice, dialogue, and alternative writing forms and question whether or not the implementation of these practices prove in some way to do other than prepare students to proceed with business as usual.[1]

Problematic Presuppositions

Empowerment. The literature of expressionist feminism in composition theory rarely employs the term empowerment; it does, however, consistently invoke the term's goals: "to give authority, to enable, to license" (Gore 56). The agent--the owner and distributor of this power--is the teacher. Such a perspective assumes that the teacher is omnipotent, that she knows what her students need to be powerful, and that she is the spring from which power flows. Through content and process she will liberate her students' female voices for their own good. Ironically, this portrait of a teacher matches the traditional view of teacher as knowledge owner and giver and subverts the notion of student-centered learning. Students are construed as receptacles waiting to be (ful)filled. Hence traditional classroom relationships are maintained beneath the cloak of emancipatory ideals.

Student voice. Often the primary emphasis of this approach to teaching writing is to help students find their buried female voices. However, some accuse this approach of construing the writer as a unified and stable self, and the search for voice as "a stable individual's seeking to square the writing with the self" (Yancey ix). It is not in the scope of this paper to engage in essentialist critiques. What concerns me here is just how we construe student voices or the lack of them: What is it that we want them to say or not to say? Does silence always mean powerlessness? Mimi Orner's "Interrupting the Calls for Student Voice in `Liberatory Education'" explores these concerns:

> Why must the "oppressed" speak? For whose benefit do we/do they speak? How is the speaking received, interpreted,

> controlled, limited, disciplined and stylized by the speakers, the listeners, the historical moment, the context? What use is made of the "people's voice" after it is heard? (77)

I suspicion as well that students are rarely silent but that rather we don't like or can't hear the voices they engage. Gail Summerskill Cummins suggests in "Coming to Voice" that the concept of voice might be compared to Greek theater--voice as mask. Writers project certain voices (wear particular masks) in order to protect certain aspects of their identities (49). So the question becomes, what right have we to strip them?

Dialogue. Moving students into authentic, self-expressive voices and asking them then to articulate those voices not only in their writing but in classroom dialogue constitutes the third aspect of this writing pedagogy. Dialogue is construed as taking place in an equitable (democratic) setting in which all participants can have their say and all voices are heard. However, such an approach ignores the basic premise of academic dialogue--that which is spoken must be reasonable, rational. Words that are not deemed so go unheard or remain unspoken:

> [T]he literature on critical pedagogy implies that students and teachers can and should engage each other in the classroom as fully rational subjects. . . . Schools have participated in producing "self-regulating" individuals by developing in students the capacity for engaging in rational argument. Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others. In schools, rational deliberation, reflection, and consideration of all viewpoints has become a vehicle for regulating conflict and the power to speak, for transforming conflict into rational argument by means of universalized capacities for language and reason. (Ellsworth 94).

Alternative writing forms. Finally, this approach proposes that through personal writing, through narratives, journals, and exploration, women liberate their buried female voices. Once those voices are liberated, students move into *real* writing: expository and argumentative. Alternative ways of articulating self and knowledge which appear to be conducive to the life experiences of many women remain construed as second-class approaches and exist outside the margins of what is defined as rational academic form.

Although alternative forms might interest and include women, and although a process of responding to data in a safe environment might free them to express their ideas and find their voice, in order to succeed they must still present a product that conforms to university standards. That product is analytical and expository; exploratory and autobiographical writing fails because "it is not appropriate to the conventions . . . not methodologically sound . . . too personal . . . not good enough" (Frey "Beyond Literary Darwinism" 508). Perhaps this particular aspect of expressionist feminist pedagogy makes most salient the rub between the expectations within individual classrooms and institutional expectations. Are we setting up women to fail in the greater academic community when we lead them into personal, exploratory writing, knowing full well that in other classes these modes of writing are respected little? Are we accomplices in perpetuating hegemony, instrumental in discrediting these other modes of expression, when we offer them only as a means to access *real* writing?

An Early View

In 1987, Caywood and Overing edited a landmark anthology in which composition theory, feminist perspectives, and classroom practice intersect: Teaching Writing: Pedagogy, Gender, and Equity. In its entirety, the work embraces and explores liberatory concerns, colliding head-on with political issues of gender equity; the teacher as advocate, responsible for developing "awareness of the primacy of equity in the classroom" (63); and the necessity of de-centering teacher authority by empowering students. I would be the last to argue the value of this work, each essay chocked full of classroom suggestions firmly grounded in theory. What continues to alarm, however, is the utopian vision the book as a whole offers, an abstract and universal myth that ends up perpetuating the status quo rather than challenging it.

For instance, Pamela Annas' "Silences: Feminist Language and the Teaching of Writing" addresses her attempts to move women "from silence to words and from private to public writing" by making female students aware of themselves as knowers, "releasing women's modes of conceptualization and creativity" (15). Citing Carol Gilligan, the article establishes a comparison between "patriarchal expressive modes reflect[ing] categories, dichotomies, roles, stasis, and causation" and "female expressive modes reflect[ing] ambiguities, pluralities, processes . . . and complex relationships" (12). She intends to build a writing community in which students are empowered to express their self-awareness through dialogue within a democratic setting:

> . . . training people to listen as well as talk, to take criticism as well as give it, to provide support as well as judgment, to experiment and take risks--overall to build a writing *community* instead of simply a writing class. (15)

This approach unfortunately establishes the myth that a teacher has the power to create a democratic environment in which all writers begin on equal footing, and all have the same ability and power to be heard. But when we assume a utopian vision we ignore the factors that make utopias untenable--inequities. Hence we create a loop of admission and denial that inhibits progress and change. Ellsworth reminds us in her critique of dialogue as a critical pedagogy that the language rules that guide this classroom practice are suspicious:

> These rules include the assumptions that all members have equal opportunity to speak, all members respect other members' rights to speak and feel safe to speak, and all ideas are tolerated and subjected to *rational critical assessment against fundamental judgments and moral principles* [emp. mine]. (106)

Similar to Annas' discussion of a writing community, this view conjoins tolerance and judgment, respect and criticism. But what goes unchallenged is just who assumes the authority to define "fundamental judgments and moral principles. Who assumes the role of critic and judge most easily? Classroom dialogue as a pedagogical convention unquestionably infers that the classroom is an equally safe environment for all participants; hence all participants stand on level ground. However, as Ellsworth so aptly puts it, "Acting as if our classroom was a safe space in which a democratic dialogue was possible and happening did not make it so" (107). Ironically, the above presentation of dialogue professes feminist concerns while simultaneously ignoring difference, much like the reoccurring myth of the classless American society that continues to sustain the status quo and inhibit real change and fairness.

Annas' approach has two prongs: (a) to liberate the female voice through personal, exploratory writing and dialogue in order to (b) move students into acceptable forms of academic writing. Students are encouraged to explore different forms of expression while "develop[ing] skills of standard expository writing" (14). But "standard expository writing" traditionally embraces "patriarchal expressive modes." Hence these modes tacitly become the goals of the writing class. Expressive modes that don't align with the norm become dangerous to voice. While Annas' explicit goal appears to be liberating the silent female voice, her implicit goal remains to develop

student expository skills, and her term for academic discourse is "standard expository writing." We can indeed celebrate Annas' invitation to students to engage in alternative forms of writing, but the undercurrent insists that the standard remains unchallenged. By dividing into two discrete categories exploratory, emotive writing and "standard expository writing," the author creates a binary that minimizes the former and valorizes the latter. Expressive, experiential, personal, journal writing juxtaposes to "standard expository writing," but the requirements of the traditional form go undefined and unchallenged. Women's silence is transformed to words, but the shape and form those words ultimately assume must fit the expected mold. Hence, in so many words, we've liberated the silent voice as an end unto itself. If this is indeed the case, then all students certainly do not begin on level ground. I have yet to find it productive to argue whether or not the two approaches to knowing and communicating that Annas presents as "patriarchal" and "female" are indeed gendered. But it is evident that only one approach to knowing, communicating, and writing is respected in academe and perceived as rational. Those who dare to communicate otherwise are construed as irrational outsiders. "The `natural' way is the way of those in power, and the `other' ways are considered inferior" (Sanborn 145). Annas' practice does little to expose or dispel this myth. To the contrary, such an approach perpetuates it.

In like manner, Olivia Frey's early essay in the same volume, "Equity and Peace in the New Writing Class," asserts that the enlightened writing class helps a female writer discover her "rhetorical voice along with her personal female voice . . . the genuine self behind the mask" (102). Since writing pedagogy has shifted to student-centered, self-discovery, she suggest that the writing classroom is equitable, democratic, and the old requirements that once marginalized certain thinkers and writers are no long present. In an endnote the author proposes that "according to the traditional and perhaps outmoded rhetorical standards, exposition or argument is the `highest' form of discourse, while narrative or description is the `lowest'" (104). But no longer do "standards generated out of cultural, political or social context that was (and is) largely patriarchal, white, privileged" hold sway (98).

The contradiction between Annas' and Frey's early perspectives are evident. On the one hand, Frey asserts that the peaceable kingdom is at hand, that all forms and voices are respected in the new writing class which works to place students in control of their own writing projects. Politics and standards no longer interfere. Annas, on the other hand, views alternative forms as a means to arrive at *acceptable* writing forms, a perspective that

suggests that not all forms and voices are respected in the greater academy. I propose that this contradiction arises, and both views stem, from the mythologizing of standard academic writing conventions. To explain, it appears odd that Annas unpacks the concept "personal writing," discussing its goals, effects and components, but fails to offer as close a scrutiny of "standard expository writing," maintaining the term as an abstraction, disconnected from any political or historical context (Ellsworth 92). This lack of scrutiny allows this form to operate at a high level of abstraction (myth) which places it beyond inspection. It just *is*--a universal standard.

Representing the other extreme, Frey assumes that exposing the standard's political roots neutralizes its power. But simply acting as if the standard no longer exists does not make its power disappear. Mary Ann Cain's recent articulation of myth and the objectification of language in Revisioning Writers' Talk: Gender and Culture in Acts of Composing suggests that "Myths acquire or lose power based upon their usefulness in interpreting experience; meaning comes from not simply what a myth says but how it functions, how it means" (12). To make my point, I assert that without scrutinizing how the myth (writing standard) functions--who it best represents, how it represents, who it excludes, how it excludes--productive change at an institutional level won't happen, for the myth continues to resonate as the ideal.

Recent Views

Somewhere between her 1987 article and one published in 1990, Frey experiences a shift in her perspective. Her later piece, "Beyond Literary Darwinism: Women's Voices and Critical Discourse," exemplifies how "standards generated out of cultural, political or social context that was (and is) largely patriarchal, white, privileged" do indeed hold sway, a position radically opposed to her early one. I must make it clear, however, that the later article veers away from composition theory and exploration of pedagogy and instead considers form as it relates to the conventions of literary criticism. Although she considers the adversarial conventions of literary criticism specifically, on a larger note her points adhere to the conventions of academic discourse generally, regardless of the field, and hence specifically to the field of composition theory, for it is indeed the case that the adversarial method she describes is fundamental to what receives credit and respect in composition courses. The goals of the method include

> establish[ing] cognitive authority not only by demonstrating the value of one's own idea but also by demonstrating the weakness

> or error in the ideas of others. At the heart of the literary critical enterprise seems to be competition, not cooperation. In my most cynical moments I have thought of our behavior as a sort of literary Darwinism, the survival of the fittest theory or the fittest scholar. (512)

Such a method, according to the (un)seminal works of such thinkers as Carol Gilligan et al., and Mary Belenky et al., suit male socialization patterns best and female patterns rarely. Frey suggests that, regardless of the important contributions made by feminist theories, women who long to succeed must still assume a voice suited to male modes of knowing.

Even as I engage in writing this piece I'm making informed decisions about voice and form, knowing that if I chose an approach that better suited my values and perceptual framework I might run a smaller chance of publication or a smaller chance of being taken seriously, as a highpowered academic thinker. Hence I am trying to reveal some new truth by exemplifying how other writers and thinkers have overlooked important information. In non-euphemistic terms, I'm trying to look smart by making others look less so. Borrowing from Lakoff and Johnson, Patricia Roberts defines this form as the battle metaphor for discourse: "to succeed in discourse is to win an argument; to win an argument you have to be hostile, contentious, and aggressive" (409). This method, Frey suggests, violates the feminine framework of relationship-building so key to feminist philosophies of knowing and communicating. Once again I reiterate that whether or not these modes ar gendered is not my focus, but allowing only one voice for all people constrains potential knowledge. Unfortunately, as long as I continue to promote this form in my own writing, I continue to perpetuate the status quo, for I still value the rationally adversarial voice as the one that counts--a value that comes through loud and clear in my teaching. Hence I end up with the same insidious imbalance as Annas, employing other forms to guide students into *real* writing, writing that gets heard, writing that counts, writing that does not call into question the standard, the myth.

Frey carefully suggests that not all women find this method restrictive or alienating, but on the other hand proposes that women who employ it speak from a less than authentic position:

> Another way that women scholars may be discriminated against is a form of suppression in which women themselves are complicit. This is the case with Janet, of Carolyn G. Heilbrun's Death of a Tenured Position, who puts on academic prose in the same way that some women wear business suits. She would not

> want to be called "female scholar." This women scholar writes academic prose very skillfully, *but it is inauthentic*. This woman, too, is silenced, although, ironically, her voice seems forceful and effective. (508 emp. mine)

This passage gets at the dilemma, the tension between essentialist claims--authentic female voice--and nominalist claims--the need to avoid emphasizing difference. Or, to put it in Susan Brown Carlton's words: "The essentialist affirms self-naming; the nominalist resists" (229). Regardless of the voice we choose, women students and writers will experience a bind: a damned if we do, damned if we don't affair. That is, if we don't engage in academic combat, we will be taken seriously? If we do employ the mythical standard and succeed, will we expedience being silenced at some crucial level? Will we close the door to a redefinition of that standard?

It is fruitless for readers to attempt to construe a writer's voice as inauthentic or authentic. As teachers, we have neither the right nor the omniscience to do so. Getting back to Cummins' claim, that voice functions as mask, protecting certain aspects of identity, perhaps a more helpful approach to this dilemma is to explore why the tragedy that plays again and again on the stage of academe, all characters assuming like masks, continues to play, in our classrooms, at the institutional level, in our professional journals. Frey's later article begins exploring that question, demythifying the standard by naming it, articulating how it functions, whom it serves and excludes.

Current Views

> What is worse is when collaborative, composition pedagogy or feminist theory forms the classroom subject, when we invite students into conversations, and then close down, form, formulate their thinking, eliminate their experiences or shape them to fit our structures. (Joan Mullins 18)

With the awareness of the racism inherent in early feminist approaches, current work places emphasis not on liberating *the* female voice (univocality) that was once construed as white and middle-class, but rather creating space in which multiple female voices might speak, within the same classroom and/or from within the same individual. Although proclamations of liberating

students' authentic voices are played down, such goals remain driving forces in current works. Discussions of the dangers of dichotomous categories of male/female voices and thinking patterns inform this later work, while concepts of empowerment and dialogue remain central to the pedagogy presented. As an example of current expressionist feminist pedagogy, I offer Donna Qualley's "Being Two Places at Once: Feminism and the Development of `Both/And' Perspectives."

Qualley argues the necessity of reductive, binary thinking, hence the necessity of essentialist considerations, as a stepping stone toward more complex thinking. Scholars' complex constructions of feminism evolve from reductive thinking, simplistic categories; thus she claims that we should allow the same evolution of thinking for our students. Her approach to pedagogy, then, is to move her students from the initial stages of understanding feminism--essentialist positions--to understandings of feminism that reflect the "multiplicity, ambiguity, and complexity" of her own understanding, now perceiving the once rigid categories as "shifting, repeatedly constructed." Ultimately, it is her goal to empower women by developing in them a new self-awareness, a feminist consciousness: "The developing feminist consciousness is first a divided consciousness . . . the place the culture has put [women] and . . . the new place they now wish to put themselves" (30). This new condition, she suggests, is the binary tension created by essentialist thinking. However, through the acquisition of *power*, women can move from this either/or predicament of the divided consciousness to the "both/and" which signifies "alternative explanations and possibilities of a raised consciousness." It is at this point that the text gets slippery. We're not sure how students acquire this new power or what they're supposed to do when they get it. The suggestion is that power is achieved by students experiencing solidarity through collaborative writing projects and classroom dialogue, much like the consciousness-raising groups of the 60s and 70s moved women into the political arena as they shared similarities of experience, creating a political body through which change at the social level was possible.

The classroom dialogue Qualley proposes operates under two assumptions. First, we must ensure that "women--that all students--have equal access to the floor and that they are free to speak in *their own voices* without interruption" (35 empasis added). Second, "[we] must also seek ways for those persons already located in positions of privilege to develop the habit of self-reflexiveness and the capacity for being in two places at once" (35), to walk in another's moccasins, so to speak. Apparently, the dialogue must empower the oppressed to speak (in their own voices), and train the

privileged to listen. The author offers an example of this approach, borrowing from Magda Lewis' practice:

> [A] male student, who, after hearing a woman classmate's presentation on violence against women, asks "why we had to talk about women and men all the time" and why the presenter did not offer "the other side of the story." Lewis realizes that encouraging this man's classmate "to speak up and intervene on her own behalf would reproduce exactly the marginalization that the young man's demand was intended to create." Instead, she [Lewis] throws the ball back in the young man's court. First she praises him for remembering the importance of including all voices in discussion. Next she asks him if he would (or could) tell the class about "the other side of violence against women." In the silence that ensues, Lewis has succeeded in opening a space for self-reflexivity, a space for the development of a different way of seeing. (35-6)

The "oppressed" did speak; whether or not she spoke in her own voice is up for grabs. The "oppressor" was silenced, indeed, and the teacher truly empowered! Ironically, the "oppressed" was silenced after she spoke, the teacher interceding with the voice of authority and the *right* view. Did the male student hold malevolent intentions? Was the female student ill-equipped to respond? How is solidarity being built here? Qualley's example makes salient Joan Mullins' observation that the current educational trend calling for interactive, cooperative, collaborative classrooms instead demonstrates that "collaboration becomes teacher-centered, the cooperation is with the teacher, the interaction is determined by the teacher" (20). Students have been compelled to speak here. Yet, returning to Mimi Orner's interests, I am concerned about the way student voices are construed, used or co-opted by the educator:

> Educators concerned with changing unjust power relations must continually examine our assumptions about our own positions, those of our students, the meanings and uses of student voice, our power to call for students to speak [or keep silent], and our often unexamined power to legitimate and perpetuate unjust relations in the name of student empowerment. (77)

In the above classroom scenario and throughout Qualley's article, I can't see any real shift away from the power structures of the traditional classroom, any self-reflexivity of instructors' own positions of power. It is the author's intention to lead students toward an appropriate understanding of feminism

that is not binary but rather complex and ambiguous by allowing them to move from essentialist perspectives into a greater understanding. The student is "given a chance to arrive logically at the universally valid proposition" (Ellsworth 96). The undercurrent, the form of this search for knowledge, is rationalist. And if the premise of our courses remains rationalist pursuits, the search for *the* truth, then how can we expect classroom dialogue to assume any other form?

In the classroom example given above, teacher and student were both complicit in maintaining the rationalist structure, but the onus rests with the teacher to redefine the expectations of the interaction if those expectations veer from traditional goals. The student "asking for the other side of the story" was engaged in the search for truth that he'd been prepared to pursue throughout his school history. Measuring one proposition against another is fair practice. But evidently he wasn't playing the right game. The teacher's unquestioned authoritative position allows her to point out her student's error, but in so doing, she probably isn't playing the game she wants to either. Her *invitation* to the male student to "tell us the other side of the story" was a summons he dared not answer, because what he might say could not possibly be right. Mullins implores us that we need to remember "that the establishment of 'falsificity,' showing someone is in error, is a device for maintaining the patriarchal status quo (20)." It appears student and teacher operate at cross-purposes mainly because the goals and purposes that drive this classroom practice were never explicitly addressed. Throughout the article, Qualley never defines her dialogic theory, other than to say that students must through dialogue learn to connect through similarities and address difference. But what are the rules? While the classroom example demonstrates a way to shift students from either/or thinking (there really was no "other side" of the story), it fails to function as an opening through which students might offer *multiple sides* of the story.

It seems to me that a much more fruitful exercise incorporates a postructuralist approach to classroom interaction, not necessarily dialogue. Instead of setting students up to dialogue--a term seeped in the academic tradition of debate--making room for students to tell their own tales, admittedly partial, would in many ways divert conversation away from debate: "Poststructuralist thought is not bound to reason, but to discourse, literally narratives about the world that are admittedly partial" (Ellsworth 96). Conversation, then, does not presume to seek *the truth* about violence against women, but rather assumes a situational perspective, a glimpse of an event colored and shaped by personal contexts. The goal of the interaction

becomes not a debate but rather as full a glimpse of the topic as those present might or are equipped to offer through "situated knowledges" (Haraway 188). I don't venture to suggest that this shift in classroom interaction creates equity. It does, however, work to undercut standard forms, the *natural* shape academic discourse assumes, and invites different kinds of voices and different roles for students and teachers to perform. But if we don't make explicit what drives our practices, both to ourselves and to our students, than more than likely the standard act, the one based on finding truth or falsificity, continues to play, the single mask, the myth looming beyond scrutiny. If the conventions that drive our classroom practices remain unexamined, then those conventions continue to hold sway, not just in our classrooms, but within institutions as a whole.

[1]It is my intention to respond specifically to texts authored by women, not to exclude men's voices but to establish women's work as primary texts. I owe the articulation of this goal to Barbara Christian who claims:

> For me, literary criticism is promotion as well as understanding, a response to the writer to whom there is often no response, to folk who need the writing as much a they need anything. I know, from literary history, that writing disappears unless there is a response to it. Because I write about writers who are now writing, I hope to help ensure that their tradition has continuity and survives. (63)

Often I disagree with the texts I engage. But even disagreement is response and continues survival, inclusion in the ongoing conversation.

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